

Houston Planning Commission

Development Impacts Meeting Wednesday, June 8, 2005 Summary

Those Present:

Bill Huntsinger	Carla Wyatt	David Collins
David Collins	David Hightower	David Robinson
Ed Taravella	Edwin Friedrichs	Jeff Taebel
Joel Reichek	Monique Ward	Wm. Reeves Gilmore
Alfonso Watts	Robin Holzer	King Lester
Kay Crooker	J. J. Smith	

Handouts: Development Impacts matrix (see attached for updates)

Review of Objectives: Produce an outline or policy paper of development impacts guidelines/objectives reflecting the consensus of committee members. Present paper to Planning Commission for public for discussion. Upon approval, the Commission may submit a document to the Mayor and City council for consideration.

Key Issue: Who is responsible for mitigating the impacts of increasing density? How can we link the evolution of Houston (redevelopment, increased density, etc.) to a vision for Houston's future?

Who's responsible?

- Currently, only the immediate neighbors are bearing the burden of increasing density.
- As stated in the first meeting, the last person to develop in an area should not have to shoulder the lion's share of the burden (ie: rebuild water/sewer lines, widen streets, build a park, build parking garage, etc.)
- Should there be a balance between public and private costs?
- Don't solve problem by creating more restrictions; instead, generate the desired impact by offering incentives.
- Some public-private partnerships are successfully creating parks in urban neighborhoods.
- One-size-fits-all approach to reaching our desired vision won't work.

What do we want our streets to look like/function as?

- We need to articulate goals/vision in order to avoid problems as seen in Rice Military.
- Developers are responding to market demand. OR, is the public simply responding to what developers are providing? Would the public prefer something else?
- How might we work to create the market that gets us to our desired state?
- To what extent do our rules stifle creativity?
- How do we ease the transition between old and new?

Examples of problems created by today's ordinance:

- Back doors facing Washington Avenue: Setbacks on Washington Avenue encourage builders to face their developments inward, towards the local streets. This has resulted in tall, opaque fences lining Washington Avenue rather than front doors of residences.
- Mobility and parking: Narrow streets and numerous curb cuts do not allow for adequate parking, circulation, and emergency access. Could alley's help resolve this issue? City shouldn't give up ROW.
- Current development process does not provide for open space in areas that are rapidly becoming more densely populated.

Other thoughts and questions

- Don't jeopardize ability to provide affordable housing. Suggested reading: "Housing Strategies for Houston: Expanding Opportunities", paper prepared by AIA and recently given to GHBA for review. The paper is posted at the following site: <http://www.housinghouston.org/>
- Where does TOD fit in?
- What happens when a commercial corridor starts blending into a residential area?
- Do variances granted eventually preclude widening streets? *Staff and Planning Commissioners consider the likely, long term impacts of streets when considering variance requests. And, yes, previous requests in the vicinity are considered.*